

We'll need universal basic income - AI 'godfather'

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The computer scientist regarded as the “godfather of artificial intelligence” says the government will have to establish a universal basic income to deal with the impact of AI on inequality.

Professor Geoffrey Hinton told BBC Newsnight that a benefits reform giving fixed amounts of cash to every citizen would be needed because he was “very worried about AI taking lots of mundane jobs”.

“I was consulted by people in Downing Street and I advised them that universal basic income was a good idea,” he said.

He said while he felt AI would increase productivity and wealth, the money would go to the rich “and not the people whose jobs get lost and that’s going to be very bad for society”.

Professor Hinton is the pioneer of neural networks, which form the theoretical basis of the current explosion in artificial intelligence.

Until last year he worked at Google, but left the tech giant so he could talk more freely about the dangers from unregulated AI.

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while not necessarily helping to alleviate poverty.

A government spokesman said there were "no plans to introduce a universal basic income".

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Professor Hinton reiterated his concern that there were human extinction-level threats emerging.

Developments over the last year showed governments were unwilling to rein in military use of AI, he said, while the competition to develop products rapidly meant there was a risk tech companies wouldn't "put enough effort into safety".

Professor Hinton said "my guess is in between five and 20 years from now there's a probability of half that we'll have to confront the problem of AI trying to take over".

This would lead to an "extinction-level threat" for humans because we could have "created a form of intelligence that is just better than biological intelligence... That's very worrying for us".

AI could "evolve", he said, "to get the motivation to make more of itself" and could autonomously "develop a sub-goal of getting control".

He said there was already evidence of large language models - a type of AI algorithm used to generate text - choosing to be deceptive.

He said recent applications of AI to generate thousands of military targets were the "thin end of the wedge".

"What I'm most concerned about is when these can autonomously make the decision to kill people," he said.

Professor Hinton said something similar to the Geneva Conventions - the international treaties that establish legal standards for humanitarian treatment in war - may be needed to regulate the military use of AI.

"But I don't think that's going to happen until after very nasty things have happened," he added.

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Asked if the West was in a Manhattan Project-style race - referring to nuclear weapons research during World War Two - with autocracies such as Russia and China on the military use of AI, Professor Hinton replied: "[Russian President Vladimir] Putin said

some years ago that whoever controls AI controls the world. So I imagine they're working very hard.

"Fortunately, the West is probably well ahead of them in research. We're probably still slightly ahead of China. But China's putting more resources in. And so in terms of military uses I think there's going to be a race".

He said a better solution would be a prohibition on military uses of AI.

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